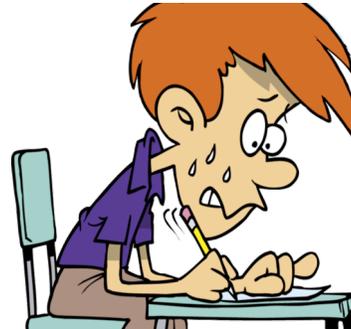


## **EXAM RELATED STRESS AND ANXIETY IN CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS**

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Anxiety symptoms are very common among children and adolescents and school related stress is well known to cause anxiety among children and adolescents. Exams, change of school, bullying are common school related stressors. Given the increased focus on academic excellence both at school and at home, exams have become a major source of stress for children.



We commonly encounter high performing children having emotional difficulties as they are unable to cope with the overwhelming stress of exams especially during their 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> class.

Children's anxiety surfaces from a greater focus on the results and marks. This results in constant worry and fear about exam failure. For some children, it is about pass or fail, for many children it is about scoring 98 vs 100. Children constantly worry about disappointing their parents and teachers and this in turn interferes with their ability to focus on their performance.

Often in our Indian setting the entire family goes through stress when a child has to take board exams. It is important for parents to understand that even though they are supportive to the child, children can feel pressurized as expectations from a child are built over years.

Here are some simple tips for parents and teachers who are keen to know how they can help their children. Though simple these are techniques based on principles of cognitive behavior therapy and found to be most effective for children with anxiety.

- Encourage your child to **talk about anxiety and academic related stress**. Help them understand that it is ok to feel anxious, everybody does.
- Let them discuss about what makes them anxious. Do not disregard their concerns as being silly or insignificant. Validate their concerns, reassure them and help them solve their problems by helping them **generate their own solutions**.
- Encourage your child to **face their fears**; avoidance of tests/exams maintains anxiety. When they do it, **appreciate** them with praise or a small gift. This will motivate them to do it more often.
- Culturally we have a tendency to follow “I say, you do...” parenting style. However parenting style needs to be modified as per the needs of each individual child in the family. For children who are anxious, disciplining should be gentle and not critical, as they can be very sensitive to criticism.
- Do not compare child’s performance with siblings or classmates; focus on the improvement made by the child as compared to his/her earlier performances.
- Identify the deficits of the child and equip them with necessary skills required.
- Most parents and teachers often feel it is necessary for children to succeed in school, sports and other activities even if they don’t convey it verbally. Children therefore feel the pressure to produce results. It is important to encourage children to work hard and to appreciate their efforts rather than talking about good marks or results.
- Regular physical activities, sports, yoga or simple breathing exercise can be helpful. They can also be encouraged to take part in extracurricular activities of their interest that are enjoyable. We see many children who have an academic schedule from 7 am to 9 pm or even worse, which gives no breathing time.
- **Practice relaxation with your child, stay calm**; children learn behaviours by watching their parents. Your advices are never heard, show them how to be without mentioning.



**What works best:**

- Focusing on child's efforts and hard work. Help them plan and prepare for the exam.
- 100% effort can ensure optimal result. Constant mention about scoring 'good marks' can generate anxiety and affect performance and in turn affect results.
- Don't hesitate to consult a specialist when in need.

We are still far away from rejoicing exams, lets at least help them go through exams stress free. Success is often not determined by one's intelligence but by one's ability to cope with stress in the long run. Exams give us an opportunity to help our children learn how to cope with stress and take them one step closer to success.

**REASONS:**

1. Excessive concern about the outcome/results.
2. Inefficient management of time.
3. High expectations from parents or teacher.

**IMPACT:****Students:**

- a. Poor performance despite preparing well.
- b. Avoiding exams.
- c. Low achiever.
- d. Academic failure.
- e. School dropout.
- f. Depression, anxiety and other problems.

**Parents:**

- a. Distressful.
- b. Anger towards child.
- c. Strain in parent-child relationship.

## **SOLUTIONS:**

### **For Students:**

#### a. Time management:



#### ***Do's:***

- Calculate the available time.
- Plan the task accordingly.
- Keep realistic targets.
- Fix definite time frame for each task.
- Try to finish the task in the defined

time frame.

- If not move to the next task and finish the uncompleted work in the additional well defined brief and fixed time slots.
- Keep brief time for relaxation in between tasks.

#### ***Don'ts:***

- Never keep target unrealistic.
- If so, it may cause distress and frustration.
- Stick to the plan, never postpone things.
- Never get upset by unplanned tasks.
- Don't push too much and exhaust yourself.
- Never deny yourself of sleep.
- Focus on your efforts.

#### b. Give your best in the preparation phase and don't bother much about the outcome.

What if you bother?

It might make you feel anxious, which might in turn lead to poor performance. It further reinforces your anxiety, which becomes a vicious cycle.